

Martha Ford remembers... riding horseback to school

Martha Ford, at age 93, is living history. She not only recalls accurately and vividly the early days of Washougal, but she still participates in civic and church organizations, has a host of admiring friends, has driven a car for 60 years, and still enjoys traveling, having made flights to Europe the past three years.

This remarkable woman still does not have gray hair.

Scholarly, interesting and enthusiastic, Martha Ford was born of German parents, Gustave and Anna Kloninger, who left for America on their wedding day.

They came to Washougal by boat, which came ashore in the sand at Parker's Landing, to inspect the 80 acres on the Washougal River that they had purchased for \$500.

Martha was born in a small cabin at the top of the hill across from her present residence, a five-bedroom home her parents built at a later time.

To attend classes, she walked to the Sunnyside School until, in the second grade when her umbrella was stolen, her father decided he would pay tuition for her to attend school in Washougal.

"There were six Krohn boys ahead of me in school at Sunnyside," Martha recalls. "The Krohns had 15 children."

Her first schoolday at Washougal, in a spelling bee, she outlasted big Johnny Herzig, which pleased her so much she still remembers it.

She rode horseback to school for many years, attending with children of the Herzigs, Cottrells, Campens, Webbers, Goots, Husbys, and more.

As there was no running water in the school building, Martha and another pupil would often be chosen to bring a bucket of water from the pump by Henriksen's store, a considerable distance.

Public dipper

"When we returned, we would pass up and down the aisles and everyone would drink from the same dipper," Martha explains, laughing at the thought of how many germs were distributed that way.

Growing up with the small town of Washougal, she remembers the grocery store, four or five saloons, and two blacksmith shops, which were important to her. "I rode so much. I would go four miles to catch my horse to ride two miles to Sunday School," she says, laughing demurely.

She would leave her horse in a covered stall at Henriksen's store, hanging her saddle behind the door, go to school and return at noon to feed and water the horse. She remembers the town pump in the center of town and the muddy roads.

Martha, always self-sufficient, was taught the Greek alphabet at home by her scholarly father, a college graduate, before she learned her ABCs at school. She also learned German at home, and how to milk a cow at age six.

Her mother, a bride of 19 when she left the culture of a German city for the raw country of the Washougal area, was a very wonderful woman, according to Martha, raising acres of flowers which she sold in Portland, sending them to market by steamer.

Acres of flowers

At one time Mrs. Kloninger had five acres of dahlias, with four to five hundred different varieties; a quarter acre of lily-of-the-valley; and sold plants and bulbs as well as cut blooms.

When World War I came, she switched to vegetables to aid the war effort. Also before the war the family home was served by a telephone, paying 50 cents a month for a switchboard connection. But during and after the war there was a shortage of wire and the service was discontinued for a time.

In 1904 Martha Kloninger graduated from the eighth grade in Washougal. The next year, to further her schooling, she enrolled at Portland High School (later Lincoln). The family was more familiar with Portland, through the flower business, than they were with Vancouver.

The late Cecil Van Vleet of Parker's Landing, was a classmate, interested in higher mathematics.

Because the Jesse Harkins sternwheeler did not run



SIM AND MARTHA FORD

on Sundays, Martha only went home to Washougal at midyear and for summer vacations.

After completing high school, she attended the University of Washington, and graduated from Bellingham Normal (now Western Washington State University).

Two years study in Germany, from 1909 to 1911, followed her college days. The crossing was made by boat, a trip she had first made at age two, when she was taken to see her ailing grandmother.

World traveler

She has enjoyed travel ever since, making the round trip to Europe nine times, three by ship and six by air. While there she visits relatives in both East and West Germany, as well as other countries. She has also visited Hawaii, the South Seas, Australia and New Zealand. Another interest is stamp collecting, a hobby her father started in 1868.

She taught school for several years from Salmon Creek to Cape Horn, milking 12 cows before and after her day's work. In 1920 she bought a Dodge car and learned to drive.

It was in 1923 in the Baptist Church in Vancouver that Martha was married to Sim Ford, a mechanic. Five years later Sim fell victim to pneumonia and died.

Martha, with her mother's determination, kept her interest in life. She enjoyed music, playing both the violin and piano, and at one time organized an orchestra.

Clarence Beatty played trumpet; Florence Rich (later Smith), piano; Florence Greenman and Will Strong, violin; Lee Greenman, piano; and Charlie Strong, cello. "We played together for quite a while," she says.

Martha also enjoyed singing contralto in the church choir, and in the Women's Chorus that sang many years for Crown-Willamette Paper Company events.

She is a member of the Soroptimists, who recently honored her, the Washougal Grange (54 years), the Business and Professional Women's Club (one of the first members), the Oregon Cactus Society, and three historical societies (Vancouver, Skamania and Camas-Washougal.)

She has been honored many times. In 1969-70, she was awarded a United States Chamber of Commerce award as outstanding senior citizen. (Denis Hayes won the junior award.)

"I have had a full life," Martha agrees. "I've been at it so many years, I don't know enough to stop." W.S.